

# ***A Powerful Prayer (part 2)***

*Ephesians 3:14-21*

When you pray, what do you pray about? What are the priorities in your prayer life? When you really get down to business with God, what rises to the surface as you state your needs before Him? I ask those questions because I want you to think on an important principle: *Our priorities in prayer tell us much about the content of our hearts.*

Paul was a man of prayer. In fact, we've already studied one of his written prayers in 1:15-23. There he prays for enlightenment. Here he prays for empowerment. Earlier he prayed that we might *know* God's power. Here he prays that we might *use* God's power.

It is possible to know a lot about automobiles – how the engine, the transmission, the drive shaft, brakes, electrical system... how a car works, yet not ever drive anywhere. In the same sense it is possible to know a lot *about* God and His Word and never *do* anything with our knowledge. We know we have "**unsearchable riches**" in Christ, do we know how to put them to use?

Last time we saw Paul's purpose in prayer and his posture in prayer. This week as we dive into the major part of Paul's prayer, I want you to notice one thing. Here Paul never prays for physical health. There is certainly nothing wrong with praying for physical health. In fact, James 5:15 says, "**The prayer of faith will save the sick.**" However, Paul's prayer priority is SPIRITUAL HEALTH, not physical health. The priority of our prayers for one another ought to be for the SPIRITUAL HEALTH of our church. Listen to Paul's prayer again:

## **Ephesians 3**

- 14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,**
- 15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,**
- 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,**
- 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,**
- 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height;**
- 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**
- 20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us,**
- 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.**

Admittedly, Paul's prayer is not what most of us pray daily. Two weeks ago I asked you to begin to pray daily these four requests: 1) for inner strength; 2) for the indwelling of Christ; 3) for Incomprehensible love; and 4) for the fullness of God.

**What Paul Prayed. (3:16-19).**

Paul makes four requests for the church.

## **I. Inner Strengthening (3:16)**

### **A. We need to be "Strengthened... in the Inner Man."**

Paul begins by praying that God would "**grant**" us "**to be strengthened... in the inner man.**" What does that mean?

First, it does not mean self-discipline or the power of positive thinking. He's not speaking of positive self-talk or inner renewal. This is not getting a new grip on yourself or turning over a new leaf.

Paul is praying for spiritual strength. We build physical strength by hard work in a gym or on a running track. However, you can't get spiritual strength that way. It is a gift of God that comes through prayer.

One of our constant prayers for each other should be that God would gift each of us with spiritual strength.

### **B. We need to be strengthened "according to the riches of His glory."**

When Paul prays that we will be "**strengthened.**" He prays that our strength will be "**according to the riches of His glory.**"

There is a big difference between getting something "**according to**" rather than "out of" God's riches. Imagine our church receives a financial gift from a billionaire, like Warren Buffet. If Mr. Buffet gave us \$10,000 that would be a generous gift, but it would be a gift "out of" his millions. However, if he gave us several hundred million dollars, that would be "**according to**" his millions or according to his ability.

Paul prays that God will strengthen us "**according to the riches of His glory.**" God's riches are limitless. The strength He can give us is a limitless, boundless, infinite strength.

Do you ever feel spiritually weak? This week I have been stressed out. The devil has been after me and my family. I've been amazed at my own spiritual weakness. The only answer I've found for spiritual weakness is prayer and praise.

How does this strength come to us?

### **C. Strengthening comes "**with Might through His Spirit.**"**

When Paul instructs us about spiritual warfare in chapter 6 of this letter he tells us to "**be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.**" When we feel weak we must turn to the Lord first!

When we are weak, we sometimes feel that the Lord does not care. That's when we need to reread chapters 1 and 2. If God has blessed us, chosen us, adopted us, accepted us, redeemed us, forgiven us, revealed to us His mystery, made us his heirs... if we are His workmanship... He certainly cares about us!

Note that we are **"strengthened with might through His Spirit."** Only the Holy Spirit can strengthen our spirits. He is the one who refreshes, revitalizes and empowers us. Sometimes I come to church beaten down by the world but leave with joy and strength in my heart. That's the work of the Holy Spirit! In the Old Testament Nehemiah tells us **"the joy of the LORD is your strength."**

Listen to **Rom.8:5-6**, **"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."**

Again we are strengthened, not on the outside, but on the inside in **"the inner man."** Too many people worried about the outside. They diet, exercise, have face lifts etc... Did you know that 1 Tim.4:8 says, **"For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come."**

Because of the strengthening work of the Spirit, even when our bodies grow weaker our **"inner man"** can grow stronger. 2 Cor.4:16 says, **"Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day."**

Here's encouragement for those of us to are getting older. As our bodies grow weaker our spirits grow stronger in the Lord!

## **II. Indwelling Christ (3:17)**

We need to be strengthened to allow Jesus to "dwell in your [our] hearts through faith."

Look at v.17. Part of Paul's prayer for our strength is **"that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."** You might say, **"Wait a minute, Pastor. I thought Jesus came to dwell in our hearts through faith when we were saved? Why is Paul still praying for this to happen?"**

I admit that at first this does sound a bit confusing, but look closer. This does not refer to the fact of Jesus' presence, but to the quality of His presence. Let me illustrate. Sometimes I get to spend a full evening at home with my family. However because of what is going on in the church or because I'm very tired, I can be present but the quality of my presence is lacking. It's time with the family but not "quality time."

Robert Munger wrote a booklet entitled, *My Heart Christ's Home*. In it he pictured the Christian life and a house. Jesus enters and goes from room to room where He is surprised to find many things with which He is uncomfortable. He goes into the library of the mind and begins to clean up the trash found there. He replaces it with His Word. He enters the dining room of the appetite and finds many sinful desires listed on a worldly menu. He replaces things like materialism, envy, pride, and lust with humility, love, meekness, and the like. He enters the living room of

fellowship and there finds worldly companions and activities. In the workshop, only toys are being made. In the closet, many hidden sins are kept. Christ could only feel comfortable after He had cleaned every room. Only then could He settle down and be at home.

Note, Jesus will " **dwell in your heart THROUGH FAITH.**" Our faith in Him must make us faithful so He can be at home in us.

### III. Incomprehensible Love 3:17-19)

#### A. We need to be "rooted and grounded in love."

1. Do you see how this prayer fits together? When the Spirit makes us strong, Jesus is able to be at home in our hearts. When Jesus is at home in our hearts, we find incomprehensible love!
2. When Jesus is Lord in our lives, we are immersed, baptized in love! In fact, we are "**rooted and grounded in love.**" Jesus said in John 13:34, "**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.**"
3. Someone explained it this way, "**The absence of love is the presence of sin.**" The ungodly life is a loveless life. There are so many songs today written from a godless lifestyle about love. Outside of a loving relationship with Jesus Christ there is no real love! It's only in Christ that we can love. In Him we can even love our enemies. If you want to check your spiritual life, ask this question, "**How much do I love?**"
4. Note Paul's metaphors. One is from the plant kingdom and the other is from a building. We are to have deep roots and a firm foundation. Are your roots as wide as your branches? Is your foundation as deep as your life is tall? Christ-like love must be the soil of our roots and the foundation upon which our lives and this church are built.

#### B. We need to "**comprehend what is the width and length and depth and height**" of the love of Christ.

1. Note the word "**comprehend.**" It means "to lay hold of, to apprehend." If we were talking about a joke, we would ask, "**Do you get it?**" When Louis Armstrong was asked to explain jazz, he said, "**Man, if I've got to explain it, you ain't got it.**" Paul prays that we "get it" that we "**comprehend**" the magnitude of Christ's love.
2. What is the "**width**" of Christ's love? It's wide enough to encompass all mankind! What is the "**length**" of Christ's love? It's long enough to last for all eternity! What is the "**depth**" of Christ's love? It is deep enough to rescue the most despicable sinner (from "the guttermost to the uttermost"). What is the "**height**" of Christ's love? It is high enough to take all His children to heaven!

3. The early Christians spoke of the cross of His love in this way: it touched the earth, pointed to heaven, and stretched out in both directions. How much does He love us? This much!

4. As His love fills us, we can love others. Remember John 13:34, "**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.**"

C. We need to "**know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.**"

1. That prayer seems like a contradiction. How can we "**know**" that "**which passes knowledge**?" Humanly speaking, we can't. This isn't human, intellectual knowledge but a divine knowledge that comes with salvation.

2. Paul is praying not that we know the love we have *for* Jesus, but that we know the love *of* Jesus. When we confess our sin, remove our obstacles and come to God in total submission, His love overwhelms us.

#### IV. Fulness God (3:19)

A. We need to be "filled with all the Fullness of God" (v.19b).

Do you see the progression here? As we receive the strength of the Spirit in our inner man, then Christ dwells in our hearts through faith, when Christ is at home in our hearts, he fills us with an abundant love, which leads to "**the fullness of God.**"

What does Paul mean by the phrase "**filled with all the fullness of God?**"

In Col.1:19, Paul wrote, "**For it pleased the Father that in Him [Jesus] all the fullness should dwell.**" Paul uses the same term here.

"**Filled**" comes from a word that means "to be overflowing, like a cup that is overfilled." It means total dominance, to come to the place in your life where you are totally overwhelmed by God's presence in your life. It means giving everything to God and leaving nothing of your self.

Are you willing to pray such a prayer? Are you willing to say to the Lord, "**Lord fill me up so that my life is all of you and none of me.**"

If we are honest we will admit that most of the time we want some of the Lord and some of us.

Listen to what Paul said in Gal 2:20, "**I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.**"

Think of an empty cup. How can you get all the air out of the cup? There is only one way... you have to fill it with something else. How do we remove the weakness, the unloviness, the sin from our lives?... by being "**filled with the fullness of God.**"

Let this priority of prayer sink into your mind. Paul is not asking for physical health. He's not asking for deliverance from his enemies. He's not asking for money or any other worldly possession. No! He's asking that God Almighty, the King of all kings to be so real in his life he can only describe His presence as being **"filled with the fullness of God."**

B. We need to "filled" with His Glory (vv.20-21).

These closing verses are a great doxology, a hymn of praise and glory to God. It teaches us 8 truths about the glory of the Lord.

1. *Our Lord is able to DO things.* He is **"able to do."**

Our God is not idle, inactive or dead. He is not asleep or on vacation. He is active in our lives and capable of answering our prayers.

2. *Our Lord is able to do what we ASK.*

This means that He is attentive and hears our prayer and longs to answer them.

3. *Our Lord is able to do not only what we ask but also what we THINK.*

God not only hears our prayers but reads our thoughts. He knows we think of things of which we have no faith to ask.

4. *Our Lord is able to do ALL that we ask or think.*

He's not limited to answering only a few of our prayers. He's not up to just some of our dreams. His power is limitless and He can do them **"all."**

5. *Our Lord is able to do MORE (above) than we ask or think.*

His expectations are higher than our requests.

6. *Our Lord is able to do MUCH more that we ask or think.*

He says He will do **"abundantly above all that we ask or think."** He does not give His grace by calculated measure. He doesn't dole it out miserly.

7. *Our Lord is able to do VERY much more than we ask or think.*

He can do **"exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think."** His dreams and visions for our lives are super abundantly greater than our own dreams and visions! His vision is immeasurable more, vastly more, infinitely more than our own vision.

8. *Our Lord does it through the power that is already in us.*

What is the **"power that works in us?"** The power of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion: Church, what are our prayer priorities. We need to learn to pray for STRENGTH, LOVE and FULLNESS. When we do the Lord will receive **"glory in the church."** God has already done more in this church than I could **"ask or think"** I can't wait to see how much **"exceedingly abundantly"** more He will do. What a privilege!